

You Just Ask Them?

When I was first at Cornell I corresponded with a girl I had met in New Mexico while I was working on the bomb. I got to thinking, when she mentioned some other fella she knew, that I had better go out there quickly at the end of the school year and try to save the situation. But when I got out there, I found it was too late, so I ended up in a motel in Albuquerque with a free summer and nothing to do.

The Casa Grande Motel was on Route 66, the main highway through town. About three places further down the road there was a little nightclub that had entertainment. Since I had nothing to do, and since I enjoyed watching and meeting people in bars, I very often went to this nightclub.

When I first went there I was talking with some guy at the bar, and we noticed a *whole table* full of nice young ladies--TWA hostesses, I think they were--who were having some sort of birthday party. The other guy said, "Come on, let's get up our nerve and ask them to dance."

So we asked two of them to dance, and afterwards they invited us to sit with the other girls at the table. After a few drinks, the waiter came around: "Anybody *want* anything?"

I liked to imitate being drunk, so although I was completely sober, I turned to the girl I'd been dancing with and asked her in a drunken voice, "YaWANanything?"

"What can we have?" she asks.

"Annnnnnnnnnything you want--ANYTHING!"

"All right! We'll have champagne!" she says happily.

So I say in a loud voice that everybody in the bar can hear, "OK! Ch-ch-champagne for evvverybody!"

Then I hear my friend talking to my girl, saying what a dirty trick it is to "take all that dough from him because he's drunk," and I'm beginning to think maybe I made a mistake.

Well, nicely enough, the waiter comes over to me, leans down, and says in a low voice, "Sir, that's *sixteen dollars a bottle*."

I decide to drop the idea of champagne for everybody, so I say in an even louder voice than before, "NEVER MIND!"

I was therefore quite surprised when, a few moments later, the waiter came back to the table with all his fancy stuff--a white towel over his arm, a tray full of glasses, an ice bucket full of ice, and a bottle of champagne. He thought I meant, "Never mind the *price*," when I meant, "Never mind the *champagne*!"

The waiter served champagne to everybody, I paid out the sixteen dollars, and my friend was mad at my girl because he thought she had got me to pay all this dough. But as far as I was concerned, that was the end of it--though it turned out later to be the beginning of a new adventure.

I went to that nightclub quite often and as the weeks went by, the entertainment changed. The performers were on a circuit that went through Amarillo and a lot of other places in Texas, and God knows where else. There was also a permanent singer who was at the nightclub, whose name was Tamara. Every time a new group of performers came to the club, Tamara would introduce me to one of the girls from the group. The girl would come and sit down with me at my table, I would buy her a drink, and we'd talk. Of course I would have liked to do more than just *talk*, but there was always something the matter at the last minute. So I could never understand why Tamara always went to the trouble of introducing me to all these nice girls, and then, even though things would start out all right, I would always end up buying drinks, spending the evening talking, but that was it. My friend, who didn't have the advantage of Tamara's introductions, wasn't getting anywhere either--we were both clunks.

After a few weeks of different shows and different girls, a new show came, and as usual Tamara introduced me to a girl from the group, and we went through the usual thing--I'm buying her drinks, we're talking, and she's being very nice. She went and did her show, and afterwards she came back to me at my table, and I felt pretty good. People would look around and think, "What's he got that makes this girl come to *him*?"

But then, at some stage near the close of the evening, she said something that by this time I had heard many times before: "I'd like to have you come over to my room tonight, but we're having a party, so perhaps tomorrow night . . ."--and I knew what this "perhaps tomorrow night" meant: NOTHING.

Well, I noticed throughout the evening that this girl--her name was Gloria--talked quite often with the master of ceremonies, during the show, and on her way to and from the ladies' room. So one time, when she was in the ladies' room and the master of ceremonies happened to be walking near my table, I impulsively took a guess and said to him, "Your wife is a very nice woman."

He said, "Yes, thank you," and we started to talk a little. He figured she had told me. And when Gloria returned, she figured *he* had told me. So they both talked to me a little bit, and invited me to go over to their place that night after the bar closed.

At two o'clock in the morning I went over to their motel with them. There wasn't any party, of course, and we talked a long time. They showed me a photo album with pictures of Gloria when her husband first met her in Iowa, a cornfed, rather fattish-looking woman; then other pictures of her as she reduced, and now she looked really nifty! He had taught her all kinds of stuff, but he couldn't read or write, which was especially interesting because he had the job, as master of ceremonies, of reading the names of the acts and the performers who were in the amateur contest, and I hadn't even noticed that he couldn't *read* what he was "reading"! (The next night I saw what they did. While she was bringing a person on or off the stage, she glanced at the slip of paper in his hand and whispered the names of the next performers and the title of the act to him as she went by.)

They were a very interesting, friendly couple, and we had many interesting conversations. I recalled how we had met, and I asked them why Tamara was always introducing the new girls to me.

Gloria replied, "When Tamara was about to introduce me to you, she said, 'Now I'm going to introduce you to the real *spender* around here!'"

I had to think a moment before I realized that the sixteen-dollar bottle of champagne bought with such a vigorous and misunderstood "*never mind!*" turned out to be a good investment. I apparently had the reputation of being some kind of eccentric who always came in *not* dressed up, not in a neat suit, but *always* ready to spend lots of money on the girls.

Eventually I told them that I was struck by something: "I'm fairly intelligent," I said, "but probably only about physics. But in that bar there are lots of intelligent guys--oil guys, mineral guys, important businessmen, and so forth-- and all the time they're buying the girls drinks, and they get nothin' *for* it!" (By this time I had decided that nobody else was getting anything out of all those drinks either.) "How is it possible," I asked, "that an 'intelligent' guy can be such a goddamn fool when he gets into a bar?"

The master said, "This I know all about. I know exactly how it all works. I will give you lessons, so that hereafter you can get something from a girl in a bar like this. But before I give you the lessons, I must demonstrate that I really know what I'm talking about. So to do that, Gloria will get a *man* to buy *you* a champagne cocktail."

I say, "OK," though I'm thinking, "How the hell are they gonna *do* it?"

The master continued: "Now you must do exactly as we tell you. Tomorrow night you should sit some distance from Gloria in the bar, and when she gives you a sign, all you have to do is walk by."

"Yes," says Gloria. "It'll be easy."

The next night I go to the bar and sit in the corner, where I can keep my eye on Gloria from a distance. After a while, sure enough, there's some guy sitting with her, and after a little while longer the guy's happy and Gloria gives me a wink. I get up and nonchalantly saunter by. Just as I'm passing, Gloria turns around and says in a real friendly and bright voice, "Oh, hi, Dick! When did you get back into town? Where have you been?"

At this moment the guy turns around to see who this "Dick" is, and I can see in his eyes something I understand completely, since I have been in that position so often myself.

First look: "Oh-oh, competition coming up. He's gonna take her away from me after I bought her a drink! What's gonna happen?"

Next look: "No, it's just a casual friend. They seem to know each other from some time back." I could see all this. I could read it on his face. I knew exactly what he was going through.

Gloria turns to him and says, "Jim, I'd like you to meet an old friend of mine, Dick Feynman."

Next look: "I know what I'll do; *I'll be kind to this guy so that she'll like me more.*"

Jim turns to me and says, "Hi, Dick. How about a drink?"

"Fine!" I say.

"What'll ya have?"

"Whatever she's having."

"Bartender, another champagne cocktail, please."

So it was easy; there was nothing to it. That night after the bar closed I went again over to the master and Gloria's motel. They were laughing and smiling, happy with how it worked out. "All right," I said, "I'm absolutely convinced that you two know exactly what you're talking about. Now, what about the lessons?"

"OK," he says. "The whole principle is this: The guy wants to be a gentleman. He doesn't want to be thought of as impolite, crude, or especially a cheapskate. As long as the girl knows the guy's motives so well, it's easy to steer him in the direction she wants him to go.

"Therefore," he continued, "under *no circumstances* be a gentleman! You must *disrespect* the girls. Furthermore, the very first rule is, don't buy a girl *anything*--not even a package of cigarettes--until you've *asked* her if she'll sleep with you, and you're convinced that she *will*, and that she's not lying."

"Uh . . . you mean . . . you don't . . . uh . . . you just *ask* them?"

"OK," he says, "I know this is your first lesson, and it may be hard for you to be so blunt. So you might buy her one thing--just one little something--before you ask. But on the other hand, it will only make it more difficult."

Well, someone only has to give me the principle, and I get the idea. All during the next day I built up my psychology differently: I adopted the attitude that those bar girls are all bitches, that they aren't *worth* anything, and all they're in there for is to get you to buy them a drink, and they're not going to give you a goddamn thing; I'm not going to be a gentleman to such worthless bitches, and so on. I learned it till it was automatic.

Then that night I was ready to try it out. I go into the bar as usual, and right away my friend says, "Hey, Dick! Wait'll you see the girl I got tonight! She had to go change her clothes, but she's coming right back."

"Yeah, yeah," I say, unimpressed, and I sit at another table to watch the show. My friend's girl comes in just as the show starts, and I'm thinking, "I don't give a damn *how* pretty she is; all she's doing is getting him to buy her drinks, and she's going to give him *nothing*!"

After the first act my friend says, "Hey, Dick! I want you to meet Ann. Ann, this is a good friend of mine, Dick Feynman."

I say "Hi" and keep looking at the show.

A few moments later Ann says to me, "Why don't you come and sit at the table here with us?"

I think to myself, "Typical bitch: *he's* buying her drinks, and *she's* inviting somebody *else* to the table." I say, "I can see fine from here."

A little while later a lieutenant from the military base nearby comes in, dressed in a nice uniform. It isn't long before we notice that Ann is sitting over on the other side of the bar with the lieutenant!

Later that evening I'm sitting at the bar, Ann is dancing with the lieutenant, and when the lieutenant's back is toward me and she's facing me, she smiles very pleasantly to me. I think again, "Some bitch! Now she's doing this trick on the *lieutenant* even!"

Then I get a good idea: I don't look at her until the lieutenant can also see me, and *then* I smile back at her, so the lieutenant will know what's going on. So her trick didn't work for long.

A few minutes later she's not with the lieutenant any more, but asking the bartender for her coat and handbag, saying in a loud, obvious voice, "I'd like to go for a walk. Does anybody want to go for a walk with me?"

I think to myself, "You can keep saying no and pushing them off, but you can't do it permanently, or you won't get anywhere. There comes a time when you have to go along." So I say coolly, "*I'll* walk with you." So we go out. We walk down the street a few blocks and see a café, and she says, "I've got an idea—let's get some coffee and sandwiches, and go over to my place and eat them."

The idea sounds pretty good, so we go into the café and she orders three coffees and three sandwiches and I pay for them.

As we're going out of the café, I think to myself, "Something's wrong: too many sandwiches!"

On the way to her motel she says, "You know, I won't have time to eat these sandwiches with you, because a lieutenant is coming over..

I think to myself, "See, I flunked. The master gave me a lesson on what to do, and I flunked. I bought her \$1.10 worth of sandwiches, and hadn't asked her anything, and now I *know* I'm gonna get nothing! I have to recover, if only for the pride of my teacher."

I stop suddenly and I say to her, "You . . . are worse than a WHORE!"

"Whaddya mean?"

"You got *me* to buy these sandwiches, and what am I going to get for it? *Nothing!*"

"Well, you cheapskate!" she says. "If that's the way you feel, *I'll* pay you *back* for the sandwiches!"

I called her bluff: "Pay me back, then."

She was astonished. She reached into her pocketbook, took out the little bit of money that she had and gave it to me. I took my sandwich and coffee and went off.

After I was through eating, I went back to the bar to report to the master. I explained everything, and told him I was sorry that I flunked, but I tried to recover.

He said very calmly, "It's OK, Dick; it's all right. Since you ended up not buying her anything, she's gonna sleep with you tonight."

"*What?*"

"That's right," he said confidently; "she's gonna sleep with you. I *know* that."

"But she isn't even *here*! She's at *her* place with the lieu-"

"It's all right."

Two o'clock comes around, the bar closes, and Ann hasn't appeared. I ask the master and his wife if I can come over to their place again. They say sure.

Just as we're coming out of the bar, here comes Ann, running across Route 66 toward me. She puts her arm in mine, and says, "Come on, let's go over to my place.

The master was right. So the lesson was terrific!

When I was back at Cornell in the fall, I was dancing with the sister of a grad student, who was visiting from Virginia. She was very nice, and suddenly I got this idea: "Let's go to a bar and have a drink," I said.

On the way to the bar I was working up nerve to try the master's lesson on an *ordinary* girl. After all, you don't feel so bad disrespecting a bar girl who's trying to get you to buy her drinks—but a nice, ordinary, Southern girl?

We went into the bar, and before I sat down, I said, "Listen, before I buy you a drink, I want to know one thing: Will you sleep with me tonight?"

"Yes."

So it worked even with an ordinary girl! But no matter how effective the lesson was, I never really used it after that. I didn't enjoy doing it that way. But it was interesting to know that things worked much differently from how I was brought up.